Dr Michael Spence  
Vice-Chancellor and Principal

7 May 2014

Ms Lucinda Corrigan  
Chair  
NSW Agriculture Industry Action Plan Taskforce  
C/- agriculture.iap@dpi.nsw.gov.au

Dear Ms Corrigan,

**Agriculture Industry Action Plan – Draft taskforce recommendations to government**

Thank you for providing the University of Sydney with an opportunity to provide feedback on the taskforce’s Draft Industry Action Plan recommendations to government. As a leading provider of education and research in agricultural and veterinary sciences for more than 100 years, the University is intimately interested in working with the NSW Government and industry to secure the success of the state’s agriculture sector.

The taskforce’s draft recommendations recognise the key drivers of agriculture industries – the opportunities of increasing Asian export markets and a reputation for the production of safe, quality food in NSW. They also acknowledge that this sector’s enormous potential for growth will only be realised if underpinned by high quality education, training, research and innovation.

NSW Agriculture and the University of Sydney have enjoyed a close and productive relationship for many decades. In an era of persistent budget pressures, particularly for agriculture R&D, we are keen to build on this relationship by harnessing the combined resources of all institutions involved in this business. The University would welcome discussions with the taskforce and government about any initiatives in which shared facilities, resources and staff could be harnessed to produce world-class agricultural R&D and research workforce renewal. An example is the recently proposed creation of the NSW Centre for Animal and Plant Biosecurity, which would have seen increased cooperation between our Faculties of Agriculture and Natural Resources and Veterinary Science at Camden and Cobbitty, and the NSW DPI’s Elizabeth MacArthur Agricultural Institute at Menangle.

Strategic collaboration and combining of resources of the NSW Government and universities would see NSW become a domestic and international force in agriculture R&D. Expanding collaboration to include the recently formed Local Land Services would be ideal. To these ends, the University is particularly interested in being part of the discussions about the taskforce’s Recommendation 11: ‘Both industry and government to investigate different models in the tertiary education sector (for example the ‘land grant university’ model) for application in NSW.’

While the United States Land Grant model could not be replicated in Australia without close involvement of the Commonwealth, there would be benefits in NSW considering aspects of the model as other Australian states have done in recent times. Generally, under the Land Grant arrangements, agricultural research, development and extension are provided in partnership through the university systems in each state, with the state departments of agriculture providing strategic oversight, policy and regulation.

Several states in Australia have adopted aspects of the Land Grant model with considerable success. Queensland, South Australia and Victoria have set up close relations between the State Department of Agriculture and universities: in Queensland with the University of Queensland; in
South Australia with the University of Adelaide at the Waite campus; and in Victoria with the Latrobe University. Perhaps the most advanced application of the model in Australia is the Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture (www.tia.tas.edu.au) which is a relatively seamless institution between the Tasmanian Government and the University of Tasmania to provide agricultural research and extension for Tasmania.

The University of Sydney is keen to engage the taskforce and NSW DPI in a discussion about the potential for similar arrangements to deliver benefits in NSW generally, but also in the following three specific areas.

1. In order to increase the efficiency and efficacy of agricultural research in NSW, we would welcome discussions about the establishment of formal collaborative research arrangements with NSW DPI in key strategic areas at our campuses in Camperdown, Camden and Narrabri. This could be achieved with the help of the various rural sector research and development corporations.

2. As the State Government inevitably moves from a government-funded extension and advisory culture to an industry-funded (private sector) consulting culture there needs be mechanisms for the pre-service and in-service training of these staff. Funding the training of these advisers as opposed to funding the consulting itself is a good cost-effective strategy for the NSW government to provide and ensure the continuation of adequate knowledge-based advice to the agricultural community. The University would be interested in pursuing this opportunity for collaboration with the NSW Government.

3. The University is home to two multidisciplinary centres that contribute to improved sustainable agricultural production: the Marie Bashir Institute for Infectious Diseases and Biosecurity has a strong food safety focus; and the Charles Perkins Centre Food and Nutrition Project Node is supporting nutrition-sensitive agriculture with a focus on sustainable family farming and nutrition-friendly value chains. Linking such multidisciplinary centres to a state-wide agricultural R&D agency would further enhance scientific rigour, competitiveness and reputation.

We believe that the time has come to integrate agricultural R&D, training and education in NSW and look forward to discussing these and other mutually beneficial opportunities for closer collaboration with the taskforce and NSW DPI. Please do not hesitate to contact me if the taskforce requires anything further from the University in relation to the finalisation of its advice to the Minister. In the first instance, enquiries should be directed to Mr Tim Payne, Director, Policy Analysis & Communication in my office: tim.payne@sydney.edu.au, 02 9351 4750, 0427 892 669. Tim will liaise with the Deans of our Faculties of Agriculture and Natural Resources and Veterinary Science to arrange meetings and briefings as required.

Yours sincerely,

Michael Spence

cc The Hon. Katrina Hodgkinson MP, Minister for Primary Industries
Professor Mark Adams, Dean, Faculty of Agriculture and Natural Resources, The University of Sydney
Professor Rosanne Taylor, Dean, Faculty of Veterinary Sciences, The University of Sydney